

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 2 of the Second Extraordinary Session

By Butt

A RESOLUTION to honor Sam D. Kennedy upon his induction
into the State Open Government Hall of Fame.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should salute those citizens who, through their extraordinary efforts, have distinguished themselves as community leaders of whom we can all be proud; and

WHEREAS, one such noteworthy person is Sam D. Kennedy of Columbia, who has been selected for induction into the State Open Government Hall of Fame by a panel from the National Freedom of Information Coalition and Society of Professional Journalists; and

WHEREAS, only the sixteenth person to be inducted into the national State Open Government Hall of Fame, Mr. Kennedy will be honored during an induction ceremony at the 2016 Freedom of Information Summit on October 8, 2016, in Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, a native Tennessean born and raised in southern Middle Tennessee, Sam D. Kennedy is the son of Dr. H.G. and Annie Porter Delk Kennedy of the Kettle Mills community near Hampshire; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Kennedy graduated valedictorian of his class at Hampshire High School at the age of sixteen prior to attending David Lipscomb College in Nashville. He graduated from North Carolina State University before proudly serving in the United States Army during World War II; and

WHEREAS, Sam D. Kennedy is a former Maury County executive, who was in office in 1985 when General Motors announced Saturn was coming to Spring Hill, and the former publisher of *The Daily Herald*, which he sold in 1983; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Kennedy's professional career also includes tenures as a private attorney, a General Sessions judge, and a district attorney general. He is currently the

publisher of the *Lawrence County Advocate*, the *Buffalo River Review*, and the *Waverly News Democrat*, and

WHEREAS, a true legend in the Tennessee newspaper industry, Sam Kennedy served as chairman of the Tennessee Press Association's Government Affairs Committee for thirty years, building strong relationships with governors and state legislators; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Kennedy and his father-in-law, John W. Finney, played key roles in the establishment of the community college system in Tennessee, working closely with Governors Frank G. Clement and Buford Ellington as well as Lieutenant Governor John Wilder and Speaker of the House and Governor Ned McWherter during the establishment of the framework that led to the founding of Columbia State Community College in 1966; and

WHEREAS, the architect of Tennessee's Sunshine Law, Sam Kennedy has had a lifelong passion for openness in government, reasoning that state and local governments, school boards, and law enforcement would work more effectively if they were accountable to the people who elected them and paid their salaries; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Kennedy said, "It's a simple premise, really. Let the people know what you're doing, why you made your decisions. Let them have access to every report and every piece of information. Hold open meetings and encourage the public to participate."; and

WHEREAS, "That may sound like common sense today, but fifty years ago, when we started pushing for a Sunshine Law, there was opposition at every turn from groups representing school boards, police, and county commissions. They felt like they were elected and should be left alone to do their jobs."; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Mr. Kennedy's resolute campaign culminated with the passage of the first Sunshine Law, signed into law by Republican Governor Winfield Dunn. It went into effect as the Watergate scandal in Washington became public, sparking nationwide distrust in government at every level as President Richard Nixon resigned for his role in covering up the scandal; and

WHEREAS, only wanting to empower people to serve as watchdogs over their government, Sam Kennedy believes that "people are better served when their local newspaper

has access, and they have access, to information. It's been a lifelong crusade on my part, I guess you could say, but it's been a healthy debate, and one that I think has made government better and more transparent."; and

WHEREAS, Sam Kennedy's ceaseless fight to keep our local and state governments as transparent as possible includes the 1973 passage of the reporter's shield law, which protects journalists' confidential relationships with sources, and a 1988 victory that makes it easier for citizens to challenge denial of public records requests; and

WHEREAS, Sam Kennedy has remained at the forefront in the battle to overturn or amend the Sunshine Law, noting that local government efforts to limit the law's scope remain unrelenting. Editor Emeritus Bill Williams of the *Paris Post-Intelligence* said, "If Tennessee's numerous battles over freedom of information were folklore, Sam Kennedy would have the role of the good giant. But these are real-world struggles with real-life heroes and villains, and Kennedy's role is just as gigantic in real life."; and

WHEREAS, a devoted husband and father, Mr. Kennedy enjoys the love and support of his wife of sixty-one years, Betty Finney Kennedy; the couple reside on a farm in Columbia near their two children and their families; and

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly find it appropriate to pause in their deliberations to acknowledge and applaud Sam D. Kennedy on this special occasion; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor Sam D. Kennedy upon his induction into the State Open Government Hall of Fame, applaud his many contributions toward improving his community and this State, and extend to him our best wishes for every continued success in his future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.